

Farming and Logging Threaten Mahogany



Marking a tree stump as part of a log tracking system in Bolivia.

CJ Rushin-Bell, USAID

The world's forests are disappearing at a rate of more than one acre per second because of illegal logging and demand for farmland.

Illegal logging ruins the environment, feeds corruption, and helps finance regional conflicts. It also threatens the livelihood of some 1.6 billion people and causes annual losses to governments of \$5–10 billion worldwide, the World Bank estimates.

"Illegal logging costs governments in lost taxes, undercuts prices of timber harvested under responsible forest management schemes, and depletes natural forest resources critical to rural communities," said Christy Johnson, forest specialist in USAID's Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean.

To cope with this threat, USAID's forestry team in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, together with regional bureaus and missions, works with local institutions and foresters in countries where enforcement is lax or where foresters lack the resources and technology to improve forest management.

USAID and its partners have supported the Peruvian government to enforce a new, more rigorous law on forests and add more than 5 million hectares of tropical forest to the country's natural parks and reserves.

Projects in Brazil include community programs to combat accidental fires, train firefighters, and conduct research into how natural mahogany can be sustainably managed and harvested. Another project looks at the lifecycle of mahogany—how it reproduces and survives in natural forests.

In Latin America, big-leaf mahogany is the most valuable commercial timber species, worth five times more than other tropical trees. Two other species, Cuban and Mexican mahogany, are already commercially extinct. Internationally, the

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) voted last year to increase protection for big-leaf mahogany.

To prevent the disappearance of mahogany as a commercial product in Brazil and Peru—where the vast Amazon jungle includes natural mahogany stands—state and federal environmental agencies, NGOs, and timber companies are working to make industry practices more transparent. The goal is to balance enforcement with market incentives to encourage responsible business practices.

As such initiatives unfold in Peru and Brazil, President Bush moved to combat illegal logging worldwide through the President's Initiative against Illegal Logging. USAID pledged \$13.8 million toward this initiative in 2003. Focus areas include the Congo Basin, Amazon Basin and Central America, and South and Southeast Asia.

USAID and the U.S. Forest Service are helping Latin American colleagues verify that mahogany enters the world market from well managed forests. In Africa, the initiative involves forest monitoring and planning, and showing loggers how to reduce the impact of harvesting. In Asia, the Agency works with the government of Indonesia and NGO partners to improve forest management transparency and strengthen the protection of orangutan habitat threatened by illegal logging.

Another avenue is to promote consumer demand for responsibly managed wood products. The Sustainable Forest Products Global Alliance seeks to improve forest management and monitoring and links responsible producers with potential "eco-certified" markets. Partners include Metafore (formerly the Certified Forest Products Council), the World Wildlife Fund, the U.S. Forest Service, Forest Trends, and Home Depot. ★